levels below levels for the previous year, the news was not all good. Soon after the introduction of gasoline containing MTBE, public health officials and the EPA in Alaska, Montana, Colorado, and New Jersey began receiving complaints of nausea, headaches, and dizziness in workers and commuters exposed to exhaust or gasoline fumes containing MTBE.

MTBE increases the oxygen content of fuel, thereby reducing carbon monoxide emissions. On March 11, EPA officials reported data showing a 95% reduction above the standard carbon monoxide levels in 20 areas, implying that the oxygenation program was effective in meeting EPA goals. However, complaints of adverse health effects prompted an investigation by state health departments and the Centers for Disease Control.

On March 10, William Roper, director of CDC, reported to Congress the findings of investigations in Alaska by a team of CDC scientists. Roper noted that CDC found measurably higher levels of MTBE in the blood of people exposed to gasoline or vehicle exhaust containing MTBE. Roper stated that MTBE is listed in the Clean Air Act as an air toxic and was once used by physicians to dissolve gall stones; however, this use was discontinued, in part, because of symptoms and side effects similar to those seen in the persons CDC studied in Alaska. According to Roper, the evidence of health effects is sufficient to suggest that MTBE may present a serious public health threat. Industry officials, on the other hand, support the safety and efficacy of MTBE and have stressed that no current studies have clearly implicated MTBE as a risk to human health. Meanwhile, EPA and CDC have agreed to collaborate on further research to characterize the risk of MTBE.

NIH Renewal Has High Priority

The legal authority permitting the National Institutes of Health to award research and training grants and to conduct its intramural research studies was given highest priority by Congress when it reconvened in January. The first bill introduced in the Senate and the fourth bill in the House provide for the reauthorization of the NIH programs. This year, the bills have not produced the same bitter controversy that created an impasse preventing reauthorization in the last session of Congress.

Perhaps the most important factor contributing to the new attitude toward the NIH reauthorization is the change in administration. The White House is no longer opposed to the use of fetal tissue in research conducted and supported by NIH. Another compelling factor is that the bill provides new authority and emphasis on research into diseases and conditions affecting women and minorities. Important among these are requirements for increasing the participation of women and minorities in clinical research. The bill also emphasizes research into hormonally related cancers such as cancer of the breast, prostate, and uterus.

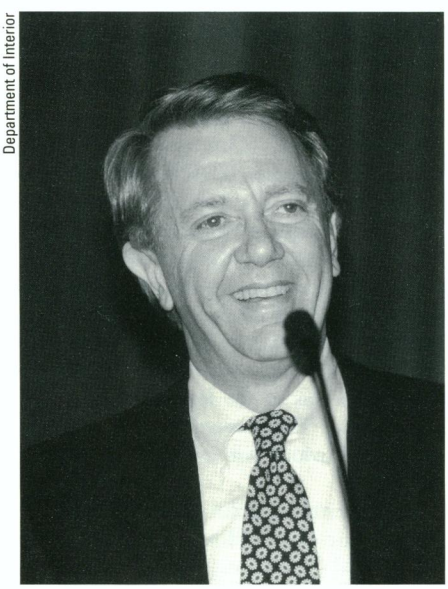
Environmental health sciences research is also prominent in the bill. If the bill passes as it is now written in the House, the National Cancer Institute and NIEHS will be required to study the incidence of breast cancer on Long Island, New York. In addition, NIEHS will be specifically mandated to increase research into the developing alternatives to whole animals for use in product testing, toxicologic research, and biomedical science.

National Biological Survey

In an effort to coordinate his department's scientific research priorities, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt has proposed a new scientific agency and has named Thomas Lovejoy, a Smithsonian Institution official and ardent conservationist, as his scientific advisor.

The National Biological Survey would coordinate the often competitive scientific activities of agencies such as the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Babbitt's proposal models the agency on the United States Geological Survey, founded through a joint effort of the Smithsonian Institution and the National Academy of Sciences. A priority of the agency would be to prepare a biological survey using an ecosystem mapping approach, as opposed to the traditional single-species approach, for use in protecting endangered species.

Department of Interior



Bruce Babbitt

The Endangered Species Act, which is administered largely by the Fish and Wildlife Service, has come under attack recently for failing to protect rare plant and animal species. An article in the March issue of the journal *Conservation Biology* charged that some species are not listed for protection until extinction is imminent, and efforts at preservation and restoration are difficult and expensive. Babbitt has said that "The biological survey could be the best insurance policy against environmental and economic train wrecks," like the conflicts between loggers and environmentalists.

Smithsonian Institution

Thomas Lovejoy

The official named to advise Babbitt on such matters is extremely well-versed in conservation issues. Lovejoy, assistant secretary for external affairs at the Smithsonian, is a former executive vice president of the World Wildlife Fund and president of the Society for Conservation of Biology. He is also a member of numerous scientific and conservation boards including the Environmental Defense Fund, World Resources Institute, and Wildlife Preservation Trust.

Lovejoy's experience and philosophy should complement Babbitt's own preservation agenda for the department. Babbitt, former president of the nonpartisan, nonprofit League of Conservation Voters, sees the mission of the Department of the Interior as teaching society to "live more lightly on the land." He has already announced several proposals designed to fulfill this goal. In addition to introducing an ecosystem approach to the Endangered Species Act, Babbitt also advocates market pricing of water in the West and market pricing for grazing cattle on federal lands, as well as an end to subsidization of timber sales by the Forest Service.